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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 004154

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SUBJECT: U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: PRC LEADERS SEND CONGRATULATIONS, CONTACTS SAY OBAMA WIN "TRANSFORMATIONAL"

REF: A. OSC/FBIS CPP20081105163001  
¶B. OSC/FBIS CPP20081105136002

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1. 4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) Chinese media coverage of the U.S. presidential election on November 5 and 6 was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting congratulatory messages from PRC President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao and predicting continued progress in U.S.-China bilateral relations. In their messages to President-elect Obama, Hu and Wen stressed the "broad common interests" shared by the two countries as well as their expectation that working with the new president-elect will "enhance mutual trust and cooperation." PolOffs' contacts attending an Embassy-sponsored election event on November 5 were impressed by U.S. electoral politics as well as the "historic" and "transformational" election of an African American as president. Liberal contacts expressed admiration for U.S. democracy and frustration over China's authoritarian political order. PRC media commentary emphasized the continuity of U.S. policy and stability in bilateral relations, while also making note of a possible increase in irritants associated with trade and human rights.

End Summary.

CHINESE LEADERS SEND CONGRATULATIONS

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¶12. (SBU) The U.S. presidential election occupied the top two slots on Chinese Central Television's (CCTV) main evening news program on November 5, a departure from the usual ranking of news stories that rarely features international news as the lead item, with Chinese leaders' congratulations cable as the lead item and President-elect Obama's comments on China as the second story. The election and the leadership's congratulatory cables were also front page news on November 6 in the Party's flagship daily, Renmin Ribao.

¶13. (SBU) On November 5 the CCTV anchor read verbatim the Xinhua news agency accounts of Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao's messages to President-elect Obama. President Hu, in his message, stated that the two countries share "broad common interests and important responsibilities on a wide range of major issues" and that he looks forward to "working with Obama to continuously strengthen (bilateral) dialogue and exchanges" and to "enhance mutual trust and cooperation on the basis of the three Sino-U.S. Joint Communiques." The CCTV anchor said that Premier Wen had "expressed belief" that the "constructive and cooperative (bilateral) relationship would make new progress" and noted that Vice President Xi Jinping had sent a congratulatory cable to Vice President-elect Biden.

¶14. (SBU) In the second news story on the election, the CCTV anchor noted that the President-elect was "the first

African-American president in U.S. history" and that the theme of his acceptance speech was that "change has come to America." The anchor outlined President-elect Obama's views on U.S.-China relations, stating that the President-elect "believes" the United States should establish "long-term, positive and constructive ties with China." The anchor said the President-elect has called for "deepening dialogue" on such bilateral issues as "economic, security and global policy" and for strengthening environmental protection and military exchanges.

CONTACTS CALL WIN "HISTORIC" AND "TRANSFORMATIONAL"

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¶5. (C) Chinese participants attending an Embassy-sponsored elections event appeared energized, impressed and even moved by the proceedings, especially by the concession and acceptance speeches. The most prominent themes cited by Embassy contacts were the "historic significance" of electing the first African-American president and the genuine, enthusiastic participation of American citizens in choosing their leaders. Ambassador Ji Chaozhu (protect), former interpreter for Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and former PRC Ambassador to Great Britain, who grew up in the United States, declared that he was "deeply moved" and had "never dreamed this day would ever come." It was a "truly historic event," Ji said, and a "major achievement" for American society. Senior editor at the Central Committee newspaper Guangming Ribao, Dong Yuyu (protect), called President-elect Obama's victory an "historic day for America" and a "new page" in American history. Relaying similar sentiments, Mou Guangfeng (protect), a Director General at the Environmental

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Protection Ministry, added that "the United States really proved itself today," calling the election outcome "a remarkable achievement of social change." Chen Lingshan (protect), a senior editor at the prominent municipal daily Xinjing Bao, saw the election as a "transformational" event that clearly illustrates the popular base of American politics. Chen was impressed by President-elect Obama's ability to resonate with ordinary people and commented on how "real" the connection is between leaders and the people in U.S. politics.

LESSONS FOR CHINA?

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¶6. (C) Relatively liberal Embassy contacts were not shy in expressing their admiration for American democracy and their frustration at China's authoritarian political order. For example, in a scathing e-mail sent to PolOffs following the Embassy election event, reformist journalist at Nanfang Dushibao Guo Yukuan (protect), praised America's electoral democracy and ridiculed China's democratic pretenses. "Being in China watching others elect their leaders," he said, "is like a eunuch watching other people make love. It is painful." But, what is "particularly sad," Guo continued, was seeing the "unrestrained pride" of American voters and cheering American citizens across the country, images most Chinese citizens will "never see on CCTV." The fact that an African-American who was raised in a single-parent household could rise to become U.S. president is something that should make "the entire world proud," Guo stated. After watching both the concession and victory speeches, Guo wrote that "only through democratic political competition" can a country achieve such "dignity and nobility." Separately, senior editor at the Central Committee newspaper Dong Yuyu (protect), told PolOffs on November 5 that central propaganda guidance issued last week instructed Chinese newspapers to curtail reporting on the U.S. election. Dong speculated that this was due to concerns over giving Chinese people "ideas" and "lessons" they might (mistakenly) want to apply to China.

¶7. (C) Pei Bin (protect), a former Ministry of Civil Affairs

official and now Senior Program Officer at the Asia Foundation, told PolOff after the Embassy election event that she was "really impressed by Americans who care about their country and their vote." When her son later that day said he "of course" wants to vote someday for China's president, Pei said she was compelled to have a "painful conversation" with him about why that cannot happen in China yet. Pei said that "as a Chinese, I am very lucky to have witnessed the enormous progress China has made for the past 30 years," but that it will "still take years and generations to make the day come for the Chinese to vote for our President," given that China has "no respect for the rule of law, no real market economy rules, no middle class big enough to vote for social justice and no checks and balances."

MEDIA COVERAGE PROMINENT, POSITIVE

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¶8. (C) The election outcome story and Chinese leader congratulations dominated the front pages of both mainstream Party papers and popular mass-circulation papers on November 6, along with photos of President-elect Obama and his family. Commentary emphasized the likely continuity and stability of U.S.-China relations, but also asserted that human rights and trade are issues identified more closely with Democratic administrations, speculating that there might therefore be heightened friction on those issues. There was little variation in academic opinion cited in think pieces, with most stressing the continuity of policy and continued development of a positive relationship, while noting that the usual irritants - trade, human rights, product and food safety, IPR and the RMB exchange rate - will remain.

RANDT